

"My family's been involved in agriculture in Southern California for about a hundred years. All my grandparents came from Japan at the turn of the last century and started farming in the Los Angeles area, that was moved and paved over and we moved down to Orange County about the time I was born. And so I think I learned that the farming ethic is always you work hard, do the right thing, be a good part of your community and I'm very proud to be a farmer and from a farming family."

"When I was in my early teens I had a chance to really get involved with agriculture. My father had bought some beehives from a farmer who was retiring, and gave them to me and I ended up learning how to take care of them, harvest the honey and market the honey. And you know I got stung a lot but I think I learned a lot about how important it is to take care of a population of things other than yourself and how critical a role bees play in terms of the nature of our world. And it was a great experience and one I'll never forget."

"After I graduated from high school, you know as all high school graduates they're wondering what to do and where you're going to work in the summer. And my sister and I started a roadside stand right down in the middle of Costa Mesa, between the buildings and everything. And we were selling cabbage and tomatoes and squash and sweet corn and green beans. And it was quite a production, we put up signs and we learned again that marketing is everything. Location--location--location is everything. And we didn't make any money but my dad I think subsidized us a little bit but it was a pretty good experience and actually we learned that every morning of our summer vacation you had to get up early enough to go get that produce early so a lot of good lessons were learned also."

"My father passed away in 1993 and my brother and I have continued our family farming operations since then. And we're still there in Orange County. People will laugh and say "Well, where are you farming?" and we say, "Well, in-between the buildings." We're "edible landscapers" down there and we don't own the ground that we farm on, we lease all the ground. And we're constantly having to move around because of development. In fact, I think we've learned the hard way, although it's been an asset, that you can take very bad pieces of ground that are choked with weeds or compacted and if you take care of them you can bring them back into production. And I think that's been a great lesson for us of recognizing that soil is always a resource, and you can nurture it, you can bring it back, you can inject and put into it the life it needs to give back life. And I think that's been a great lesson as well."

"As the Secretary of the Department of Agriculture here in California, I'm dedicated and committed to protecting not only our agriculture resources but the environment as well, because they go hand in hand. Here in the 21st century, agriculture and the environment really are coming together as a very important partnership in how we move forward. The farmers in our state are amazing, they produce 400 different crops. They're just like my own family operation. Growers have a lot of ingenuity, a lot of determination to stay in business and I know the role that this department plays and the role that government plays is helping make sure that we have this stable food supply. Food security is what we would call it, something that we can depend on. And I think all the farmers that I know, whether they're in animal agriculture or plant agriculture, what we look for is predictability. And I know that's something that this department has to try and deliver, as well as our government, because ultimately we all want a predictable food supply."

"I think maybe because I come from an urban area, I've watched people just lose their sense of what agriculture is all about and I've been passionate about education about things that are natural, things that are from agriculture, things that are growing, things that impact I think everybody's life. I've watched how tough it is to see young kids eating horrible diets. We call it a bad fertilizer program. I've watched people question whether a carrot really comes out of the ground. Young kids...they can't believe a carrot can come out of the ground. And I recognize that there's something very wrong there. I think there's a wonderful book called "The Last Child in the Woods," and it talks about this "nature deficit disorder," if you will, that takes place. And I think if people can't understand agriculture in its major sense, that it's something about taking care of, culturing, life, they can't understand that, they have a hard time supporting it. And I think that's as important as anything we can do from our department or throughout government, is we have to be able to show people how important these life lessons are. And agriculture is all about life lessons."

"When I'm done here serving as the Secretary of Agriculture, I plan to go back and do what I was always doing, continue to do the work in communities, working with hunger, nutrition, working with education, focusing on our family business and I will come back to that with a rich store of experience as far as understanding what agriculture is to society, how we fit, how we don't fit, why we have to make every effort to try and make ourselves more relevant, even though everyday we're relevant because everyday people are going to eat and use the products that come from agriculture. So I'm looking forward to that but in the meantime we have a lot of work to do."

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